

A  
New England Pioneer  
—  
FRENCH



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Johnson, 1730-1810.

A New England pioneer : "The  
captivity of Mrs. Johnson"

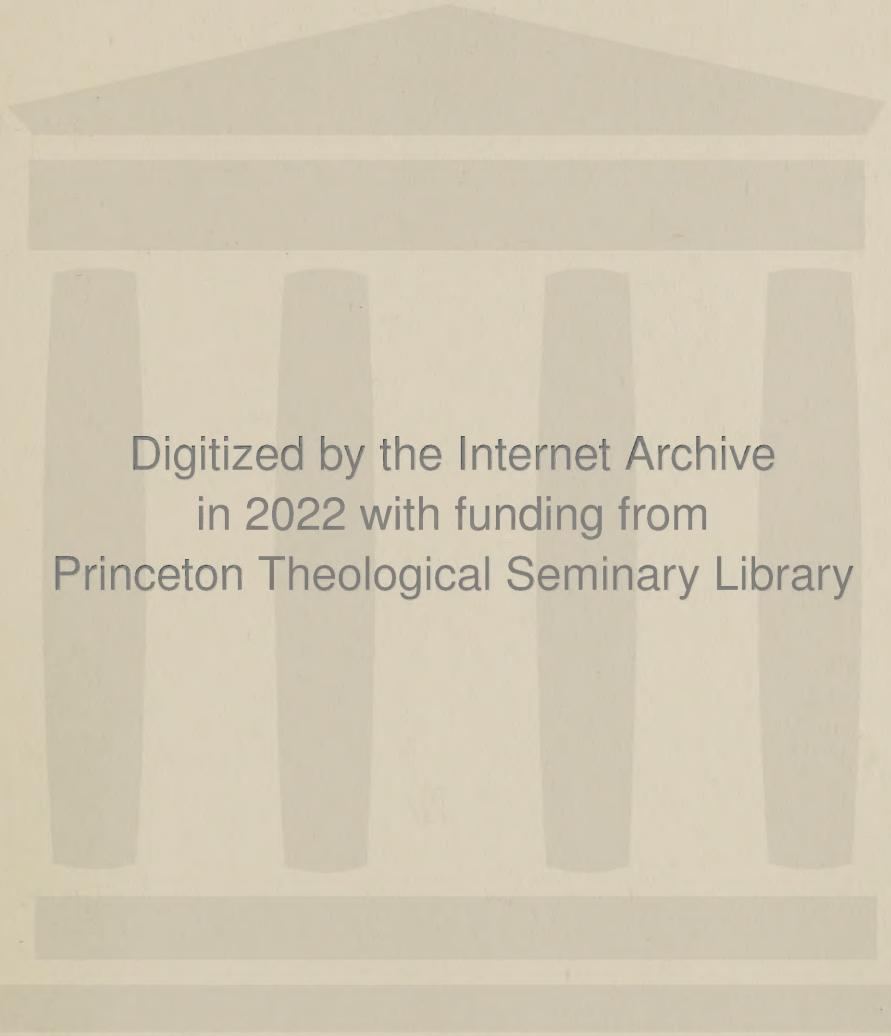
Emma Bailey Speer

Pens

Mayell Williams French

January 4<sup>th</sup> 1925





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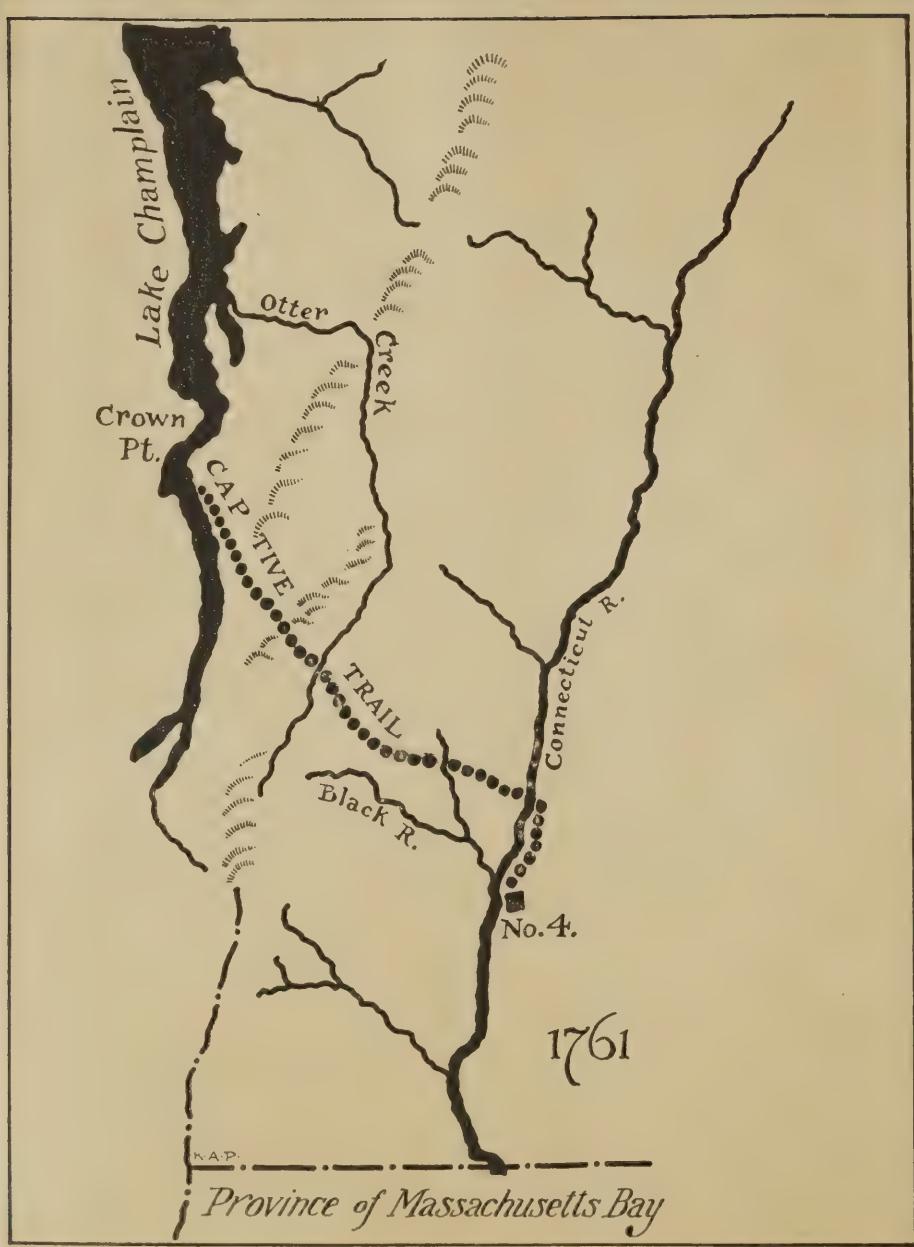




# A New England Pioneer







Susannah (Willard) Johnson Hastings



# A New England Pioneer

"THE CAPTIVITY OF MRS. JOHNSON"

The Story of her Life with an Account of her  
Capture and Experiences during four years  
with the French and Indians, 1746-1750;  
in part as written by her and in part  
as condensed by

MARY M. BILLINGS FRENCH

*Illustrated with Photographs by*

CLARA E. SIPPRELL



THE ELM TREE PRESS WOODSTOCK VERMONT



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## INTRODUCTION

One of the rarest and most thrilling of early American pioneer records is "A NARRATIVE OF THE CAPTIVITY OF MRS. JOHNSON, containing an account of her sufferings during four years with the Indians and French." The first edition was published in 1796 at Walpole, New Hampshire. A second edition of 1807 was "corrected and enlarged." In 1814 a third edition was published "together with an appendix, sermons preached at her funeral and that of her mother, with sundry other interesting articles." So remarkable was the story that at least two other editions were printed in America in 1834 and 1841 and two in England in 1797 and 1802. In 1907 the book was reissued as a part of the Indian Captives Series.

Mary M. Billings French, who is the great-great-granddaughter of Mrs. Johnson, the heroine of the story, has prepared the narrative which follows, in part presenting it as originally written by Mrs. Johnson.

The Algonquins and the Iroquois were rival native confederations at the beginning of the eighteenth century. One of the sub-divisions of the Algonquins was called Abnakis, at other times called Waubaneekees or St. Francis Indians. They were friendly to the French with whom they had alliances.

It was their chief, Grey Lock, after whom the highest mountain in Massachusetts was named, who was the "scourge of the English settlements." What is now Vermont was used by the Abnakis as their beaver hunting ground and fishing place, but mostly as their thoroughfare. They left some picture writing near Bellows Falls, a few relics, some trails, many names, scattered graves, and pitiful stories of grawsome massacres. Mr. Rowland Robinson, Vermont's best historian and prose writer, says that all the Indian names of Vermont lakes and rivers are Algonquin. Most of the available information names the Algonquins, or more particularly the Abnakis, as the Indians who ravaged the settlements in the Connecticut River valley. Mrs. Jemima Howe and her seven children were taken from Vernon, Vermont, on June 27, 1755, by Missisquoi Indians who were Abnakis. It was probably the same tribe who on August 30, 1754, attacked Number four.

The pioneer had come into an unbroken forest, making his little clearing and building his log hut, where the only sound was the blow of his axe, the howl of the wolves, the song of the bird and the sough of the wind in the trees. Few dared to live far from well fortified forts. Mr. Walter Hill Crockett devotes the entire third chapter of his History of Vermont to the Indian occupation, when life was constantly threatened with "the war whoop at mid-night, the torch and the tomahawk, the cruel journeys over rough mountain trails, and the fear of attack or ambush." Some of these dangers persisted even after the Revolutionary War.

The story of Mrs. Johnson's captivity is one of the few surviving written accounts of the penalties pioneer adventure had to pay for the privilege of its liberty. The wonder is that Mrs. Johnson ever survived to tell the story. An equal wonder is that she could tell it so well. In her diary we have not just the customary legends which often accumulate details in subsequent years, but the verified account of actual events. Mr. Horace W. Bailey says: "These stories of Indian raids are historical gems, actuated by a spirit of thankfulness and gratitude to Almighty God for remarkable deliverances; with an unclouded view of conditions in a military post and a new settlement on the extreme frontier. The story of Mrs. Johnson uncovers the Indian trail into Canada, discloses aboriginal habits and mode of life and warfare."

The long original diary written by Mrs. Johnson twenty-five years after her capture is made the center of the following story. No important details have been omitted. The "historical gem" has just been polished a little, and cut down to better size that its facets may shine more brilliantly.

Our heritage of privilege and liberty looms large as we read of how these families were "hurried through thorny thickets in an unmerciful manner," when "gloomy fear imposed a deadly silence," and death seemed inevitable. The descriptions of how they were kept alive on snake-root broth, the new-born babe nourished on the juice of horse flesh, and how the tear of woe moistened the sickened cheek of every prisoner is followed, not by bitter complaints, but by gratitude "to the Author of all

blessings", and the claim that they were the "favorites of fortune". "Let us not complain" was their only warning. How strange all this story seems to us who love these same valleys in which these events took place. How far away they seem in the face of our unbroken peace.

"The savages are driven beyond the lakes, and our country has no enemies. The gloomy wilderness that secreted the Indians and the beast of prey, has vanished away; and the thrifty farm smiles in its stead; the tomahawk and the scalping-knife have given place to the plow-share and the sickle". Because Mrs. Johnson could write such sentences from her own observation she believed "no one can set a higher value on the smiles of peace, than myself". But we should also know the price of our peace, and one way to come into its appreciation, is by an understanding of such facts, of its origin, as are told in the following story.

HERBERT H. HINES

Woodstock Vermont  
August 10 1926

# A New England Pioneer



## A New England Pioneer

So much has recently been written about the struggles of the pioneers of the West, and so vividly have the motion pictures shown the difficulties and the perils of the pack trains as they wound their way across the continent in those early days, that perhaps for the moment we have forgotten that the settlement of Northern New England was fraught with comparable danger.

For two centuries the valley of the Connecticut River and the Lake Champlain region were Indian highways, where attacks were made by the French and Algonquins on the North, with counter attacks by the English and Iroquois on the South. Here are to be found accounts of wanton cruelty, of the burning and pillaging of homes, of the capture and often the savage murder of helpless women and children.

At the close of the year 1636 there were settlements as far north as Hartford, Connecticut and Springfield, Massachusetts, comprising perhaps a total population of a thousand persons. Then from time to time, adventurous souls pushed on up both sides of the Connecticut into the wilds, often only to be driven back to the more populous and better fortified settlements.

### NUMBER FOUR

By 1740 a few families had struggled on to a place which is now Charlestown, New Hampshire, then known as "Number 4", which was for fourteen

years the most northerly white settlement in the Connecticut Valley.

In 1744 the building of a fort in "Number 4" was begun and that same year an ancestress of the writer of this paper, Susanna Willard, at the age of fourteen, describes a visit she made to her parents, who had moved to this outpost of civilization two years before. She does not state why she had been left behind, perhaps to go to school. At all events, she says her journey began at Leominster, and from the map, it would seem that she had to travel a distance of sixty miles. She does not say whether the journey was made on foot or on horseback, but it must have been by one means or the other, for she tells us that marked trees were their guides as they cautiously picked their way through gloomy forest and only a few solitary inhabitants were passed.

The first object to be seen when she reached "Number 4" was a party of Indians, holding a war dance, their spirits having been raised by a keg of rum. At this time this settlement was composed of nine or ten families, who lived in huts not far apart. The Indians in this region were then numerous and friendly. During her visit the erection of a saw mill was celebrated by a party and the first boards sawed were used for a dance.

#### NOTICES OF MR. JAMES JOHNSON

In three years this girl visitor married. We wish she had told us how long she tarried in "Number 4" and something about her courtship, but that is all left to our imagination. We are glad however

that we have some information about the man she married. It seems that in 1730 Colonel Josiah Willard, an uncle of Susanna, was in Boston, and one day went to the wharf to see some transports that had just landed from Ireland. He found a group of gentlemen who were looking at some lads, who had been placed on shore in order that they might exhibit their activity to those who wished to purchase. Colonel Willard noticed particularly a boy about ten years old. He was the only one of the crew who spoke English and he bargained for him. In telling about this event, the future wife of this lad wrote: "I have never been able to learn the price, but as he was afterward my husband, I am willing to suppose it was a considerable sum." The boy was questioned about his parentage and descent but all the information secured was that young James Johnson a considerable time previous went to sea with his uncle who commanded a ship and had the appearance of a man of property; that his uncle was taken sick and died; and that immediately after his death they came in sight of this ship of Irish transports and the boy was put on board. Because he was the only one of the crew who spoke English and because of other circumstances, his friends became convinced that the removal of the boy to the Irish ship was to facilitate the sequestration of his property. He lived with Colonel Willard until he was twenty years old and then he bought the remaining year of his time. In 1747 at the age of about twenty-nine, he married, and the following year Governor Shirley gave him a lieutenant's commission under Edward Hartwell, Esquire.

The two years previous to this marriage were critical times for the inhabitants of "Number 4." There were constant raids by the Indians, prisoners were taken, several were killed outright. At last fatigued with watching, and weary of the dangers of the forest, the town was deserted in the fall of 1746.

Six months later Colonel Phineas Stevens with thirty men returned to the fort which also had been deserted and found it uninjured and in good condition. An old spaniel and a cat had guarded it safely through the winter and gave the soldiers a hearty welcome.

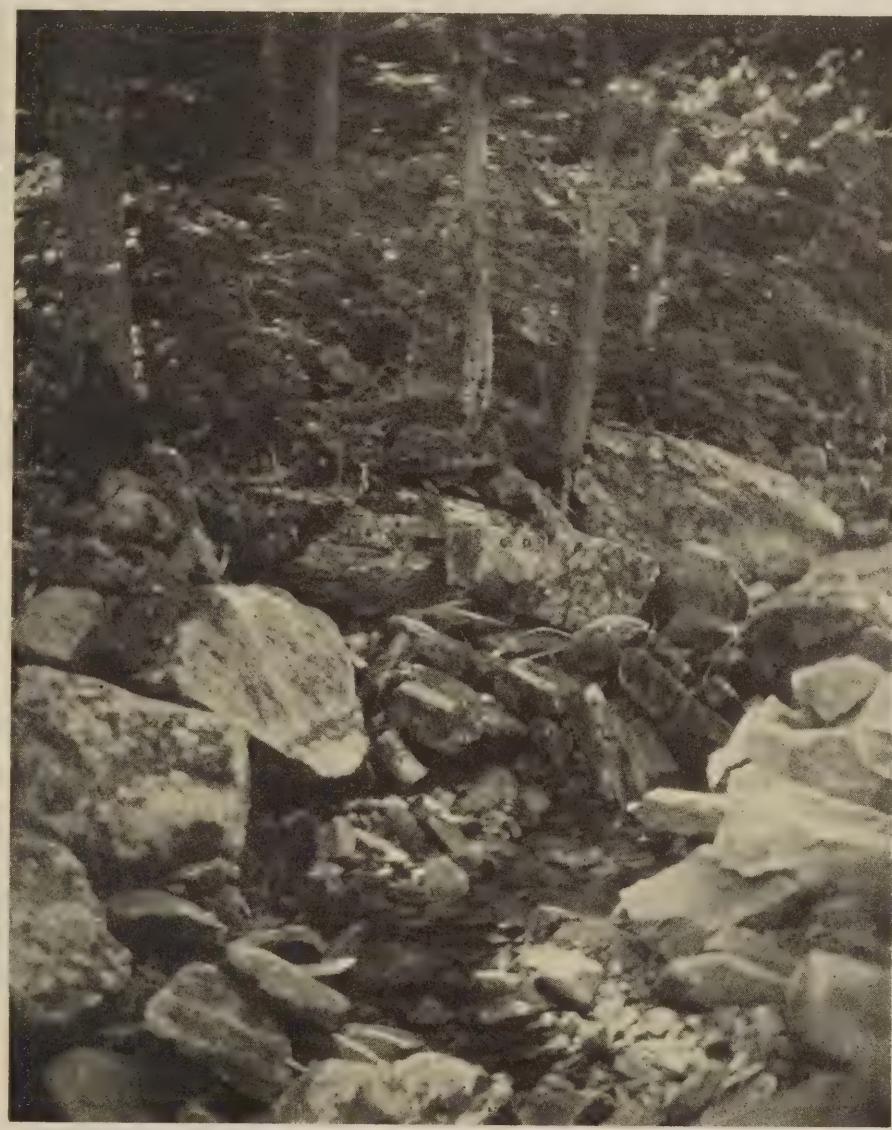
A few days after the fort had been taken over by Captain Stevens and his troops, a furious attack was made by 300 French and Indians. The battle lasted for five days. Every stratagem possible was practiced by the enemy to reduce the garrison but to no avail and at the end of the fifth day the enemy retreated.

An express was at once sent to Boston with the tidings, and Governor Charles Knowles rewarded Captain Stevens with a handsome sword, and in gratitude for his kindness the town was named Charlestown.

In a few months Captain Stevens was joined by his family and the record states he encouraged the settlers by his fortitude and industry.

#### CHARLESTOWN

The following year, when James Johnson and Susanna Willard had been married two years (we are not sure where that time was spent, but it was



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

**WHERE THE CHILD WAS BORN**

Here and there, surrounded by the smiling loveliness of Vermont farm lands, wilderness still exists. Time has gone by without changing the spot where, by the side of the stony brook, Captive Johnson was born 172 years ago (1754)



probably in Leominster), she writes that her husband's enterprising spirit made him wish to remove to Charlestown. So they undertook the hazardous, fatiguing journey. They arrived safe at the fort and found there five families who had been equally venturesome. Two or three days after their arrival, information was received of the cessation of war between Great Britain and France. Orders were received from Massachusetts that the troops were to be withdrawn from Charlestown.

The enemy must have had advance information of the plan to evacuate, for the very day the soldiers left, the Indians appeared, shot Ensign Sartwell, who unsuspecting of danger was harrowing corn, and took the boy who was with him prisoner. Only seven women and four men were left in the fort. The father and brother of Mrs. Johnson were in the meadow and hearing the guns supposed the fort had been destroyed and fled to secure aid.

Her husband had gone to Northfield and was able to get back in two days with five or six others. A post was dispatched to Boston to carry the news of the attack, but it was ten days before the sentry cried out that troops were coming. Great was the relief of all concerned when those of their number who had been missing, including both father and brother, were found to be with the troops. This was the last time the frontiers suffered during the Cape Breton War.

For the next three years the settlers lived most of the time in the fort, going out from there to cultivate the fields; but as is quaintly said, "Not much confidence was placed in the Savages."

## THE SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY

As peace continued, the enmity of the Indians gradually seemed to disappear. They evidenced a desire for friendly intercourse and came to traffic in furs and to trade for blankets, etc. Every appearance of hostility at length vanished and it seemed safe to move to the farms not far distant from the fort. Settlements increased with tolerable rapidity and the new country began to assume the appearance of civilization. The year 1753 was all harmony and safety.

But very early in the following year a rupture between the French and the English seemed likely. The disputed boundary line between Canada and the English Colonies being the cause of trouble, the frontier towns were in a perilous position. War however was not immediately expected and Mrs. Johnson wrote that her husband felt he could risk a business trip to Connecticut. He set out the last day of May and the three months he was gone were full of anxious forebodings for those left behind. The Indians were reported to be on a march of destruction. The terrors that were experienced especially at night were horrible beyond description. And during the day every one treaded cautiously by hedge and hillock, lest some secreted savage might start forth to take his scalp. Their gloomy fears were soon confirmed by the news of the capture of a family on Merrimac River. Their imaginations now saw and heard a thousand Indians.

On the twenty-fourth of August, the Connecticut traveler returned with reports that a war was



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

THE CONNECTICUT NEAR CHARLESTOWN

A peaceful, quiet, beautiful river slowly winding its way between pastures and wooded hills of Vermont and New Hampshire, once a great Indian highway. It was along this stretch that the Indians dragged their prisoners on the morning of the capture, and it was probably this island, known then as Wilcott Island, that they used as a convenient stopover in crossing the river on improvised rafts



expected in the spring, but that no immediate danger was contemplated. Preparations were therefore made to remove to Northfield as soon as the hay had been consumed and the pigs fattened on an ample stock of grain.

#### THE DIARY OF THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

Frequent parties were given to celebrate the return of the traveler and on the evening of August twenty-ninth the neighbors assembled and spent the time very cheerfully with watermelon and flip until midnight. Little did they then realize what days of horror were to follow. Their experiences can best be described in the words of Mrs. Johnson. "We rested with fine composure till daybreak when we were roused by neighbor Labaree knocking at the door. He had shouldered his ax to do a day's work for my husband. My husband opened the door. "Indians, Indians" were the first words I heard. In an instant a crowd of savages fixed horribly for war rushed furiously in. I screamed and begged my friends to ask for quarter. By this time they were all over the house, some upstairs, some hauling my sister Miriam out of bed, another had hold of me and one was approaching my husband, who stood in the middle of the floor to deliver himself up, but the Indian, supposing he would make resistance, and be more than his match went to the door and brought three of his comrades and the four bound him. I was led to the door fainting and trembling. There stood my friend Labaree, bound,—Ebenezer Farnsworth whom they found up chamber,

they were putting in the same situation and to complete the shocking scene, my three little children, Sylvanus, six years old, Susanna, age four, and Polly, two years old, were driven naked to the place where I stood.

"After what little plunder their hurry would allow them to get, was confusedly bundled up, we were ordered to march. Two savages laid hold of each of my arms, and hurried me through thorny thickets in a most unmerciful manner. I lost a shoe and suffered exceedingly. My little children were crying, my husband and the two other men were bound and my sister and myself were obliged to make the best of our way with all our might. The loss of my shoe rendered travelling extremely painful. At the distance of three miles there was a general halt; the savages supposing that we, as well as themselves, might have an appetite for breakfast, gave us a loaf of bread, some raisins and apples which they had taken from the house. While we were forcing down our scanty breakfast, a horse came in sight, known to all by the name of Scoggin. One of the Indians attempted to shoot him, but was prevented. They then expressed a wish to catch him saying by pointing to me "for Squaw to ride." My husband had been unbound to assist with the children; he with two Indians caught the horse on the bank of the river. By this time my legs and feet were covered with blood and the Indians gave me a pair of Moggasons. Bags and blankets were thrown over Scoggin and I mounted on the top of them and on we jogged for about seven miles, to the upper end of Wilcott's Island.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

**THE BLACK RIVER**

Typical of the country traversed by the Indians and their prisoners is this picture of Black River, on the banks of which they camped on the third day of their journey. In the background are the mountains that they had to cross on the fourth and fifth days before they reached "the waters that ran into Lake Champlain"



We then halted and prepared to cross the river; rafts were made of dry timber; two Indians and Farnsworth crossed first, Labaree, by signs, got permission to swim the horse; my husband was allowed to swim by the raft, that I was on, to push it along. We all arrived safe on the opposite shore, a fire was kindled and some of the stolen kettles were hung over it and filled with porridge. The savages took delight in viewing the spoil which amounted to forty or fifty pounds in value. Our tarry in this place lasted an hour. Then the Indians pronounced the dreadful word "munch" (march) and on we must go. We went six or eight miles and stopped for the night. The men were made secure by having their legs put in slit sticks, somewhat like stocks and tied with cords, which were tied to the limbs of trees too high to be reached. My sister, Miriam, much to her mortification must lie between two Indians, with a cord thrown over her and passing under each of them; the little children had blankets and I was allowed one for my use. Thus we took lodging for the night with the sky for a covering and the ground for a pillow. In the morning we were roused before sunrise, the Indians struck up a fire and made us some water gruel. After a few sips, I was again put on the horse, with my husband by my side to hold me on.

"It soon became imperative to call a halt on my account. The Indians showed humanity by making a booth for me and at about ten o'clock a baby daughter was born. They then brought me some articles of clothing for the child, which they had taken from the house. My master looked into the

booth, and clapped his hands with joy, crying "two monies for me, two monies for me." I was permitted to rest the remainder of the day. The Indians were employed in making a bier for the prisoners to carry me on, and another booth for my lodging during the night. They brought a needle and two pins and some bark to tie the child's clothes. At dusk they made some porridge and johnny cakes, my portion was brought me in a little bark. In the morning we were summoned for the journey. I with my infant in arms, was laid on the litter, which was supported alternately by my husband, Labaree, and Farnsworth. My sister and son were put upon Scoggin and the two little girls rode on their masters' backs. Thus we proceeded two miles, when my carriers grew too faint to proceed any further. This being observed, a general halt was called for council. My Indian master soon made signs to Mr. Johnson that if I could ride on the horse, I might proceed, otherwise I must be left behind. Here I observed marks of pity on his countenance but this might arise from fear of losing his two monies. I preferred to attempt to ride on the horse, rather than to perish miserably alone. My weakness was too severe to allow me to sit on the horse long at a time. Every hour I was taken off and laid on the ground to rest.

"On the fifth day the Indians sent out two or three hunting parties, who returned without game. Our last morsel of meal had been consumed. Hunger with all its horrors looked us earnestly in the face. Before dark we halted; a plan to relieve their hunger was decided on by the Indians and Scoggin



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

THE BEAVER POND

This is one of many small ponds that are found on the Otter Creek and its branches in the region crossed by the party of prisoners in 1754. It may be the very pond that Mrs. Johnson was forced to wade on the sixth day after her child was born and in the middle of which she fainted from cold and exhaustion



was shot. His flesh was in a few moments broiling on the embers.

"On the morning of the sixth day, the war whoop was sounded and we began to fix for a march; my fate was unknown till my master brought some bark and tied my petticoats as high as he supposed would be convenient for walking and ordered me to "munch." With scarce strength to stand alone, I went on for half a mile. My power to move then failed, the world grew dark and I dropped down. A council was held and a pack-saddle was made for my conveyance on the back of my husband, who took me up and we marched in that form the rest of the day. After supper my booth was built as usual and I reposed much better than I had the preceding nights. In the morning (the seventh day) I found myself greatly restored. I "munched" in the rear till we came to a beaver pond. Here I was obliged to wade; when half way over, up to the middle in cold water, my little strength failed and my power to speak or see left me. While motionless, and stiffened in the middle of the pond, I was perceived from the other side by my husband who laid down the infant and came to my assistance; he took me in his arms and when the opposite shore was gained, life had apparently forsaken me. The whole company stopped, a fire was built, my strength was restored by degrees and in two hours I was told to "munch." The rest of the day I was carried by my husband. In the middle of the afternoon, we arrived on the banks of one of the great branches of Otter Creek. The river was very rapid and passing dangerous. Mr. Labaree when half

over with my child was tripped up by its rapidity and lost the babe in the water; little did I expect to see the poor thing again but Mr. Labaree fortunately reached a corner of its blanket and saved its life. The rest of us got safe to the other shore, another fire was built and my sister dried the infant and its clothes.

"The eighth day Mr. Johnson took me on the pack saddle and we resumed our march. That night was terrible with thunder, lightning, and rain; the cold earth to lie on and no cover over our heads.

"We had not proceeded far the next day (the ninth) when the Indians signified to us that we should arrive before night at East Bay on Lake Champlain. This was a cordial to our drooping spirits and caused an immediate transition from despair to joy. The idea of arriving at a place of water-carriage translated us to new life.

"My son Sylvanus, six years old, had walked barefoot the whole journey. My two little girls with only their shirts and part of one of the three gowns which the Indians gave me were subject to all the damps of morn and night and Mr. Johnson's situation was pitifully painful. The fatigue of carrying me on the wearying pack saddle had rendered his emaciated body almost a corpse and his sore feet made him a cripple. My sister Miriam, owing to her youth and health, suffered least. She was only fourteen years old.

"About the middle of the afternoon the waters of the Lake were seen. Here we were to take passage in boats and find relief from thorny hills and



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

#### THE OTTER CREEK RAPIDS

Some of the water power that years ago tripped kind Mr. Labarree and nearly carried away the newly born Johnson infant has been since captured by civilization and most of the Otter Creek rapids have been marred by mills and power stations. But here and there a wild, untouched spot remains, where the rushing stream carries us back to the time when little Captive was nearly drowned in its foam



miry swamps. Twelve hours sailing would waft us to the settlements of civilized Frenchmen.

"When we reached Crown Point, each prisoner was led by his master to the residence of the French Commander. We were ordered to his apartment, and used with that hospitality which characterizes the best of the nation. We had brandy in profusion, a good dinner and a change of linen. I had a nurse who in great measure restored my exhausted strength. My children were all decently clothed and my infant in particular. The first day, while I was taking a nap, they dressed it so fantastically, *a la France*, that I refused to own it, not guessing that I was the mother of such a strange thing.

"A respite of only three days was allowed us and then we were again delivered to the Indians, who led us to the water side, where we all embarked in one vessel for St. Johns, where we arrived after a disagreeable voyage of three days. We had now come to within a few miles of St. Francis, where our Indian Masters belonged. The settlement of St. Francis consisted of about thirty wigwams and a church, in which mass was held every night and morning. My fellow prisoners were dispersed over the town. I found myself with my infant in a large wigwam with two or three warriors and as many squaws. When the hour for sleep came, I was pointed to a platform raised half a yard, where upon a board covered with a blanket, I was to spend the night.

"Mr. Johnson was only allowed to stay a few days in St. Francis and then he was carried to

Montreal to be sold. My two daughters were soon after taken to the same place.

"My Indian master being a hunter wished my son to attend him on his excursions. He therefore arranged for an exchange of prisoners. The exchange was made with great formality. My son and blankets being an equivalent for myself, child and wampum. I was then taken to the house of my new master and found myself allied to the first family. My master was son in law to the Grand Sachem. On my arrival at his wigwam, an interpreter informed me that I was adopted into his family. I was then introduced to the family and was told to call them brothers and sisters. I made a short reply, expressive of my gratitude at being introduced to a house of such high rank, and requested their patience until I could learn the customs of the nation.

"My time now was solitary beyond description; my new sisters and brothers treated me with the same attention that they did their natural kindred, but it was an unnatural situation to me. I was a novice at making canoes, bunks and tumplines, which was the only occupation of the squaws; of course idleness was among my calamities. The uneasiness occasioned by indolence was in some measure relieved by the privilege of making shirts for my "brother." At night and morn I was allowed to milk the cows. The rest of the time, I strolled gloomily about, looking sometimes into an unsociable wigwam, at others sauntering into the bushes and walking on the banks of brooks. Once I went with a party to fish, accompanied by a number of



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

**THE EAST BAY OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN**

Time has changed the character of the country, but the sky, the distant mountains, the quiet blue waters of Lake Champlain set in a frame of dark hemlocks and golden red foliage, were the same in September, 1926, as on the day when Mrs. Johnson and her fellow prisoners, their spirits revived by the joy of having reached a place of water carriage, beheld "the waters of Lake Champlain from a neighboring eminence" on the ninth day of their arduous journey



squaws. My weakness obliged me to rest often, which gave my companions a poor opinion of me, but they showed no other resentment than calling me "NO GOOD SQUAW," which was the only reproach my sister ever gave when I displeased her.

"One morning, my little son came running to me, his eyes swollen with tears, exclaiming that the Indians were going to carry him away into the woods to hunt; he threw his little arms around me, begging in the agony of grief that I would keep him. The keenness of my pangs almost obliged me to wish I never had been a mother. 'Farewell, Sylvanus,' said I, 'God will preserve you.'

"In justice to the Indians, I ought to remark that they never treated me with cruelty to a wanton degree. Few people have survived a situation like mine and few have fallen into the hands of savages disposed to more lenity and patience. Modesty has ever been a characteristic of every savage tribe, a truth which my whole family will corroborate. Can it be said of civilized conquerors that in the main they are willing to share their last ration of food with their prisoners? Do they ever adopt an enemy and salute him by the tender name of brother?

"In the early days of November, over sixty days since our captivity, Mr. Johnson wrote from Montreal asking me to try to prevail on the Indians to carry me there to be sold, as he had made provision for that purpose. The Indians agreed to this and on the eleventh day thereafter, I had the supreme satisfaction of meeting my husband, children and friends and I then learned that all my fellow prisoners had been purchased by respectable

persons, by whom they were treated with humanity."

Thus in her own words, Mrs. Johnson told the tale of the capture of herself and family by the Indians and of her life with them until the time came for her to be delivered to the French in Montreal.



#### RESIDENCE IN THE CRIMINAL JAILS

All prisoners held for ransom in Canada at this time seem to have been treated alike in certain particulars. It was customary for captives to be bought and taken into the houses of residents, where in some cases they were treated well, in others conditions must have been extremely difficult. The mere fact that it often involved the separation of various members of families could hardly fail to work hardship in many instances.

Mrs. Johnson, her sister Miriam and the baby were taken into the home of a French family by the name of DuQuesne. A place was found for Susanna with three maiden ladies, named Jaisson, and Polly was bought by the Mayor of the City.

On November 12th, the day after their arrival in Montreal, a two months' parole was granted James Johnson that he might return to New England and try to procure money to redeem his family. He went first to Boston to lay his case before the Governor. Governor Shirley referred it to the General Assembly. After deliberation by that body, the sum of £10 was granted to defray his expenses, but no hope was held out of any further assistance. He was advised to apply to New Hampshire. This he

did with more success, in that he was promised notes to the value of £150, and instructions were given him as to the way in which this money should be spent. He was told to go to Canada and to negotiate there in the best and most frugal manner possible the purchasing of as many captives as he might hear of that had been taken from any part of the province. Credentials were then given him by Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire, a passport was secured from Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, and everything seemed satisfactorily arranged for his return to Montreal. He had proceeded, however, only a short distance when he received orders that he must not even make an attempt to go further as word had been received that an invasion by the French was imminent.

In Montreal his failure to appear within the specified time was considered a breach of parole and an abuse of confidence. In consequence, the position of his family was seriously affected. They were looked at askance, assistance was withdrawn from them. It became necessary for Mrs. Johnson and Miriam to try to earn money to support themselves.

Six months elapsed before permission was given Mr. Johnson to return to Canada. He was then ordered to proceed privately through Albany. He set out immediately and when he reached Albany, notes on certain individuals in Canada were given him.

During his absence, conditions in Montreal had changed materially and on his arrival there, a new Governor refused to accept apologies for his breach of parole, his notes were protested and he was

thrown into jail, where soon after orders were received for his removal to Quebec, and it was stipulated that his wife and his two youngest daughters should accompany him.

Before leaving Montreal, the baby was taken ill and the belief of many of the people was so strong that, if she were not baptized, she would either die or be carried off by the devil, that consent was given for the ceremony of baptism. According to the wish of Madame DuQuesne, the baby was named Louise for her and the baby's mother added the name Captive; and it is by the latter name that this daughter is always mentioned. A two days' trip by boat carried the prisoners to Quebec, where they were taken directly to the jail and found there one of the inmates huddled in a corner half dead with small-pox. In due time, all except the baby came down with this disease and were removed to the hospital. On their recovery, they were at once sent back to the jail, which according to the accounts, must have been a dreadful place, dirty and infested with vermin.

At the approach of winter, the one fire allowed each day proved slight defense from the severe Canadian frosts, especially as the iron grates gave free access to the sky. A quart basin was the only article allowed them in which to cook their food and it also had to serve as table furniture. At times they were able surreptitiously to send letters by placing them in an ash box, where they were taken by friends and Mrs. Johnson writes that they sometimes diverted themselves by the use of Spanish cards, and that as Mr. Johnson was ignorant of the

game, she took no inconsiderable pleasure in instructing him.

After being confined in this prison for five months, with the exception of the time spent in the hospital, there seemed to be no prospect of relief. Their jailer seemed like a veritable descendant of Pharoah, but he was finally persuaded to ask an influential man, a Mr. Perthieur, to come to see them. When Mr. Perthieur saw the conditions and heard about their sufferings, he was highly affronted with his countrymen for reducing them to such distress, and declared that the Lord Intendant himself should call on them. The next day the Lord Intendant came and explained that although he himself had no authority to release prisoners, he would convey a letter to the Governor which might have the desired effect.

A letter was accordingly written which described the pitiful state of the prisoners and urged that measures be taken to improve their conditions. It also reminded His Excellency that Sylvanus was still held captive by the Indians and begged that steps be taken for his rescue. A request was also made that Miriam and Susanna be allowed to come to Quebec.

#### THE CIVIL PRISON

The letter was successful only in so far that orders were received for their removal to the new jail. Assurance was given that everything possible would be done to rescue Sylvanus, but little hope was given as to the outcome of such an attempt.

Word was also sent of the well being of Miriam and Susanna.

Soon after the receipt of this communication the prisoners were transferred to the new jail, called the Civil prison. This proved to be a great improvement over the old one. Here they found decent beds, candles, fuel and all the conveniences belonging to prisoners of war. The sum of 15 pence a day was allowed Mr. Johnson on account of a lieutenant's commission which he held under George the Second and he was permitted to go into the city once a week to purchase necessaries. A washer woman was provided for their use. They were no longer confined to the narrow limits of a single room, but were restrained only by the bounds of the jail yard. Mrs. Johnson wrote that their situation was such a contrast to what had been endured in the gloomy criminal jail that they imagined themselves the favorites of fortune and in high life.

In December 1756, two years after their capture, a son was born, who lived only a few hours and was buried under the cathedral church. Soon after a letter brought the news of the death of Moses Willard, the father of Mrs. Johnson, and it also told of the wounding of her brother. This happened as they were mending a fence in Charlestown, just a few rods from the Main Street. They were fired on by Indians and Moses Willard was shot dead on the spot.

These melancholy tidings in addition to all her other troubles affected Mrs. Johnson seriously. She was taken to the hospital, but in a month she was able to return to the prison and in May, Miriam was al-



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

**MRS. JOHNSON'S RESTING PLACE**

In the shady Charlestown cemetery on a hill overlooking the town, which she first knew as No. 4, and the country which was the scene of the first stage of her amazing journey, Mrs. Johnson is buried next to her second husband, Colonel Hastings, and their four children who died in infancy. A picturesque row of flat, gray slate stones in the midst of the newer, more elaborate stones of marble and granite



lowed to join her sister. They had not seen each other for two years. Another attempt was then made to gain their liberty. The Lord Intendant was interviewed. He promised to lay their case before the Governor in Montreal and to give them an answer in seven days. At the expiration of that time, permission was granted them to leave the prison. Lodgings were taken in the town and when a few weeks later a Cartel ship arrived to carry prisoners to England for an exchange, an appeal was made to the Governor to ask that they be included among those who were to sail, and that Susanna be sent to Quebec to join her family.

The Governor replied that he would consent to their going to England with the other prisoners. He also promised to send Susanna to Quebec by the first boat. But three days before the boat for England was due to sail, the ship arrived from Montreal without Susanna, and at the same time counter orders were received to the effect that Mr. Johnson must be retained a prisoner.

A solemn council of all the prisoners was held to determine what should be done. It was decided that Mrs. Johnson should sail with her sister and the two little girls, even though it meant leaving her husband behind, a prisoner. Sylvanus was still with the Indians, and Susanna in Montreal. It was therefore, with mixed feelings that they set sail July 20th, 1757.

#### VOYAGES TO ENGLAND AND NEW YORK

On the boat they were treated with great consideration. Accommodations were provided for them

with the family of the captain, and a boy was assigned to them for their especial use.

In just a month's time the boat dropped anchor at Plymouth and all the passengers were taken off except Mrs. Johnson, Miriam and the two little girls. For a day and a half they did not know what was to be their fate. They seemed to have been forgotten. At length an officer came on board to see if everything was in readiness for the French prisoners who were to be transported to Canada. When he discovered the four passengers that had been left on board, an explanation was made and he took them ashore. The Admiral was consulted. Lodgings were procured, and the King's allowance of two shillings a day was granted them for maintenance.

A fortnight was spent by them in Plymouth, where they attracted a great deal of attention and many questions were asked concerning the sufferings they had undergone.

Captain Mason, a fellow lodger, appealed in their behalf to the agents for New Hampshire with offices in London. Arrangements were made by these offices to send the four to Portsmouth, there to sail on a packet boat bound for America. They accordingly set forth and arrived in Portsmouth, but it was only to find the packet boat gone.

Lodgings were taken in Portsmouth until such time as another boat should sail. In a few days word was received that the man-of-war Orange would be ready to sail within three hours. All possible haste was made but when they reached the shore they discovered that the Orange was too far

underway to be recalled. At this moment a ship was seen in the near distance weighing anchor. It was found to be one of the fleet bound for America. A longshoreman was pressed into service. He hesitated only long enough to pronounce a volley of oaths and then consented to row them out to the boat. As they came alongside the captain flew into a rage and said he would have none of them on his vessel. Fortunately for them the purser was on hand with his list of passengers booked for America. As soon as their names were discovered to be on the list, the captain apologized and took them aboard.

A fair wind brought them to Cork where a stay of two weeks was made to take on provisions, and the latter part of October the homeward voyage began. After a smooth passage of seven weeks they dropped another at Sandy Hook on December tenth, 1757, and the day following landed in their native country after an absence of three years, three months and seven days.

In New York the Mayor had provided lodging for them and there was great rejoicing when information was received that Mr. Johnson had been released and was even then on his way back by boat to Halifax, and that Sylvanus had been redeemed from the Indians for the sum of 500 livres.

Ten days were spent in New York but there is no record of their doings during that time. Their next move was by boat to New Haven. There they met a number of officers who had been stationed in Charlestown the preceding summer and could therefore report on conditions in that region and also

tell them about relatives and friends. Some of the officers offered to escort the travelers as they set forth on their journey home through Springfield.

Mr. Johnson had by this time arrived in Boston and had at once started for Charlestown. When within fifteen miles of Springfield he was told that his wife was in that town. He therefore hastened there by sleigh and at two A. M. January first, 1758, he and his wife were reunited.

In a few days it was deemed advisable for him to go to New York to adjust his Canada accounts. It was on this journey that he was persuaded by Governor Pownal to take a captain's commission and join the forces bound for Ticonderoga. He was killed that same year in battle on July 8th, 1758. A fellow officer said of him that he was universally beloved by his company, that he was the soldiers' friend, and a friend to his country; that he had easy manners, was pleasant, good-humored, yet strict to obey orders, a valuable member of society, a faithful and valiant soldier.

In October, about three months later, information was received that Sylvanus had been brought to Northampton by Major Putnam and that he was sick with scald. He was found to be in a miserable condition after his experiences of three years with the Indians and one year with the French. He had at first no recollection of his family and during his absence he had entirely forgotten the English language. He could speak a little broken French. The Indian dialect, he spoke with ease. He knew how to brandish a tomahawk and bend a bow.

For a year Mrs. Johnson lived in Lancaster. It was



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARA E. SIPPRELL

**THE JOHNSON MONUMENTS AS SEEN TO-DAY**

The two stones executed under the direction of Mrs. Johnson were placed together on the spot intended for the larger one alone, namely, where the Indians encamped on the first night of the journey. Describing her last visit to this place in 1808 Mrs. Johnson wrote: "It was then a dreary wilderness, now the wilderness was turned into fruitful fields dressed in verdure, which richly repaid the labors of the husbandman." Now nothing beside the old stones set into protective granite is left to remind one that the peacefully pastoral country around was once "a howling wild", haunted by savage Indians



deemed safe for her to return to Charlestown in October 1759. Conditions however could not have been very stable there, for the very next summer Joseph Willard, who lived only two miles away, was captured by the Indians with his wife and five children and carried to Montreal. They arrived there only a few days before the French surrendered it to the English. When they returned to Charlestown, after an absence of about four months, they brought Susanna with them. She had been with the three maiden ladies, the Jaissons, for five years. They had treated her as their own. Their principal care had been to give her the accomplishments of a polite education. Susanna loved them dearly. She had forgotten her family and spoke nothing but French.

#### THE HISTORY ENDS

In Charlestown Mrs. Johnson had inherited a house from her mother, and this became her home; and to help support her family, she and her brother went into partnership and kept a small store. The general assembly of New Hampshire granted her forty-two pounds as indemnity for losses sustained in the war.

Much delay and perplexity were occasioned in the settlement of Mr. Johnson's estate. It would seem as if in those early days the processes of law might have been comparatively simple, but such does not seem to have been the case, for in order to arrive at a settlement, the widow had to take three journeys to Portsmouth, fourteen to Boston, and three to Springfield; and this was no easy task,

for the roads were rough and the means of travel primitive.

Three years after the death of her husband, Mrs. Johnson, who was then thirty-two years old, married Mr. John Hastings. He had been one of the early settlers. She writes that she remembered having seen him on her first visit to Charlestown when she was fourteen years old.

Of the remaining forty-nine years of her life, Mrs. Johnson wrote little. She told that her husband lived on for forty-two years and that they had seven children five of whom died at infancy; one of their daughters lived to be twenty-two years old, the other married a man who proved to be a sore trial to his mother-in-law. She tells about two accidents that she had, one when her horse was frightened by a boy wheeling a load of flax in Charlestown. She was thrown and the violence of the fall was so great, together with a wound in her forehead, that she was taken up for dead. She told how a neighbor, Mrs. Page, sewed up the cut in her forehead and that she recovered her strength as soon as could be expected.

Another time, when she was driving, the harness slipped, the horses became terrified, the wagon was overturned, she was dragged, her ankle was broken and the bone very much shattered. She was carried on a bier to the home of her daughter Captive, where for several weeks she suffered excruciating pain. She wrote that when she was laid on the bier, it brought fresh to her mind the bier that the Indians had made for her after the birth of her daughter Captive.

In writing about Sylvanus no mention was made of his marrying. He is spoken of as living on in Charlestown.

She told that Susanna married Captain Samuel Wetherbee, and in gratitude and affection for all that the Jaisson ladies had done for her when she was a little girl in Montreal, she named one of her sons Jason, and it was this boy, Jason Weatherbee, who was the great-grandfather of the writer of this paper. To complete the genealogy it should be stated that Jason Weatherbee married Sophia Farwell. Sophia Weatherbee married Oel Billings. His son, Frederick Billings, was the father of the writer.

Both Polly and Captive married happily. There seems to have been an especial bond between Captive and her mother. For forty years they celebrated the anniversary of her birth and in after years when Captive had moved away to Canada, the day never passed unnoticed by either mother or daughter.

In closing the account of her life, Mrs. Johnson mentioned with pride her thirty-eight grandchildren, and twenty-eight great-grand children. She noted that in their family instances of longevity were remarkable; that her mother, before her death had been able to say to her daughter, "Arise my daughter, and go to thy daughter, for thy daughter's daughter has got a daughter."

In November, 1810, Mrs. Johnson died. She had lived to be eighty-one years old. Only a few weeks before her death she had revised the manuscript of the book which she called "The Captivity of Mrs. Johnson."

Near the town of Reading, Vermont, two stones stand by the side of the road. On one of them is inscribed "This is near the spot that the Indians encamped the night before they took Mr. Johnson and family, Mr. Labaree and Farnsworth, August 30th, 1754, and Mrs. Johnson was delivered of a child half a mile up this brook."

On the other smaller stone which originally stood a short distance away: "On the 31st of August 1754 Capt. James Johnson had a daughter born on this spot of ground being captivated with his whole family by the Indians."











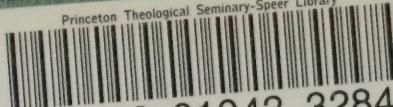








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